

**What is HIV/AIDS?**

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) slowly breaks down the body's immune system, leading to an advanced stage of HIV disease known as AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). AIDS is diagnosed when a person has a CD-4 count of fewer than 200 or an opportunistic infection, which is a specific type of illness as a result of HIV infection.

**HIV Is Transmitted Through ...**

- Blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk of a person with HIV
- Unprotected oral, anal and vaginal sex
- Sharing injection needles
- Perinatal transmission (from mother to child in the womb or at birth)
- Breastfeeding

**HIV is NOT Transmitted Through ...**

- Kissing or holding hands
- Mosquitoes
- Sharing bathrooms
- Sneezing or coughing
- Normal workplace, day-care or school interaction

**To Protect Yourself From HIV ...**

- Choose not to have sex.
- Use a latex or polyurethane condom or barrier (dental dam) for oral sex.
- Don't use oil-based lubricants (lotion, Vaseline®, etc.); they can weaken a condom, causing it to leak or break.
- Talk with sexual partners about their HIV status.
- Don't have sex when you are drunk or high; using alcohol or other drugs affects judgment and can lead to unsafe sex.
- Don't share injection needles.
- Know your status, get tested.

To prevent HIV in the workplace standard precautions described by the U. S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) as universal precautions should always be followed when blood or blood-containing body fluids are handled.

**What are the symptoms of HIV/AIDS?**

- Rapid weight loss
- Fever or excessive night sweats
- Dry cough
- Diarrhea that lasts more than a week
- Extreme and unexplained fatigue
- Swollen lymph glands

- Unusual rashes
- Frequent or reoccurring infections
- Neurological disorders, including depression and meningitis

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

When first infected with HIV, you may have no signs or symptoms at all. Even if you don't have symptoms, you're still able to transmit the virus to others. You may remain symptom-free for many years, but as the virus continues to multiply and destroy immune cells, you may develop more infections or chronic symptoms.

### **HIV Testing**

HIV tests look for HIV antibodies and not the virus itself. A person's body responds to HIV by developing antibodies to help fight off the virus. The average time it takes for someone infected with HIV to develop and test positive for HIV antibodies is 25 days, but it can take up to three months (at most, six months) to develop HIV antibodies after infection.

### **What Does a Negative Test Result Mean?**

- It means that no HIV antibodies were in your body at the time of the test.
- This may mean you do not have HIV or that you have HIV, but your body has not had time to make HIV antibodies.
- Get tested again at least three months after any risky behavior to know your HIV status.

### **What Does a Positive Test Result Mean?**

- It means that HIV antibodies could be in your body and you should have a confirmatory test
- If you have a positive confirmatory test, you have HIV.
- Learning that you are HIV-positive, you may feel shocked, angry, sad or overwhelmed and not know what to do first.
- You can talk to your HIV test counselor or doctor to learn about different options available, or just to talk with someone about your recent diagnosis.

### **What is the treatment?**

Although there is no cure for HIV, there are drugs that slow down the damage it does to the immune system. When they are effective, these drugs can reduce the amount of HIV in a person's body. The drugs do not work for everyone or totally rid the body of the virus. The virus continues to actively make copies of itself, until a person's immune system can no longer fight them as effectively. The most important thing you can do after you learn that you have HIV is to work closely with your doctor. Because HIV and HIV-related illnesses vary from person to person, your doctor will design a medical care plan specifically for you.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

Infected individuals can transmit the virus throughout their lifetime. There is no cure for HIV.

### **Additional Information:**

Additional information is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/HIV](http://www.ndhealth.gov/HIV) or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health HIV Program at 800.70.NDHIV (800.706.3448)

**This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.**

